DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 832 CS 503 555

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TITLE The Perception of Shogun in a Midwestern Community.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 12p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (31st, Minneapolis, MN, May 21-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults: *Attitudes: Audiences: College Students: Cultural Awareness: *Ethnic Bias: *Programing (Broadcast): Surveys: *Television Research: *Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS Audience Analysis: Audience Response: Japanese Culture: *Shogun

ABSTRACT

A two-part telephone survey was conducted to examine (1) the television viewing preferences of those who did and did not watch the television program "Shogun," and (2) the relationship between attitudes toward ethnic groups and perceptions of the program. An extensive questionnaire for a college student sample and a more simple form for a community sample were each divided into four parts, with the first part asking how often respondents watched selected programs, the second asking the viewers' evaluation of "Shogun," the third asking about ethnic attitudes, and the fourth asking demographic questions. Viewers in the community resident sample indicated that they thought "Shogun" was entertaining and accurate, and they disagreed with the statement that Japanese customs were "weird." Residents' attitudes to ethnic groups were favorable in general, but viewers of "Shogun" were more tolerant of ethnic groups than were nonviewers. The more homogenous student sample followed the same pattern, although members of the sample were undecided as to the program's accuracy. The results supported the theory that any effects on perceptions of oriental culture were most likely to be felt by viewers already sympathetic to the program's content. (HTH)

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THE PERCEPTION OF SHOGUN IN A MIDWESTERN COMMUNITY

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Presented at the annual meeting of the
International Communication Association
Minneapolis, Minnesota
May 1981

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THE PERCEPTION OF "SHOGUN" IN A MIDWESTERN COMMUNITY

The National Broadcasting Company's five-part twelve-hour "mini-series" Shogun, based on James Clavell's best seller of the same title, reached an estimated 125 million American television viewers during the week of September 15, 1980.[1] That figure represents approximately sixty-two percent of television viewers, assuming that there are about 200 million viewers six years or older. The number of Shogun viewers has only been exceeded by Roots, with an estimated 130 million viewers, which was aired during January, 1977. Just as Roots generated interest in black history, culture and geneology, Shogun has prompted what Newsweek facetiously termed "Samurai Night Fever."[2] According to the newsweekly, "bars sold out of their supplies of Sake, boutiques reported runs on kimonos." Some newspapers carried lengthy script excerpts and plot summaries. Others published scholarly examinations of Japanese culture. Shogun fueled what appears to be a growing interest in Japanese life and lore among Americans.[3]

Scholarly studies of the responses to Roots indicated that the program had social impact. From results of a national survey, Howard, Rothbart and Sloan concluded that Roots had an inflammatory effect on racial problems in the United States.[4] Goldberg concluded that Roots was responsible for an increased concern for human rights in general, and for people learning more about black history, specifically.[5]

Hur and Robinson's study,[6] however, reported that the actual influence of Roots on racial attitudes of whites was less than suggested by either Goldberg or Howard, et al. A cross sectional survey among black and white viewers confirmed the selective exposure hypothesis. Blacks were more likely

to watch the program, to consider the program accurate and to discuss it with others. The white viewers, on the other hand, remained unconvinced that what blacks endured during slavery was any worse than what white immigrants went though. In other words, any possible effects on the perception of black culture or slavery that Roots might have was most likely felt by those whites and blacks already sympathetic to the program's content.

In general, studies of the relationship between racial attitudes and perception of "ethnic" television programs tend to support the selective perception hypothesis. For example, Vidmar and Rokeach reported that the dominant effect of All in the Family was the reinforcement of existing attitudes.[7]

The purpose of the two studies summarized in this report was to test the selective exposure and selective perception hypotheses by examining the distinctive differences, demographics and television viewing preferences of those who did and did not watch Shogun. An additional feature of the investigation was the examination of the relationship between attitudes toward ethnic groups and the perception of Shogun.

METHOD

Pilot Study

A preliminary telephone survey of 185 randomly selected residents of a midwestern college community was conducted during the week of October 1, 1980. The respondents were asked if they had or had not watched Shogun and what their reactions to the program were if they viewed any of the episodes. The responses to these open-ended questions served as the basis for the questionnaires developed for the study. One extensive questionnaire was developed for the college student sample while a second, more simple form was developed for a telephone survey of community residents.

Questionnaires

Both questionnaires were divided into four parts. The first set of items assessed the respondents' preference for television programs. Subjects were asked if they always, frequently, occasionally, seldom or never watched selected programs. The target programs included two ethnic comedies (The Jeffersons and Archie Bunker's Place), two situation-comedies (Laverne & Shirley and Angie), two investigative dramas (Quincy, M.E. and Charlie's Angels), two news features (60 Minutes and 20/20), a daytime soap opera (General Hospital) and a prime time melodrama (Dallas).

The second set of questions focused on the viewing of "Shogun" and the respondent's perception and evaluation of the program content. Respondents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with or were undecided about the following statements:

1. The program was entertaining.
2. It was an accurate portrayal of Japanese history.
3. The story was hard to understand.
4. The program was too drawn out.
5. I learned a great deal about oriental culture.
6. Japanese customs are weird.

Two additional questions were asked on the college student questionnaires only:

7. It depicted too much violence.
8. I wish to see more of this kind of programs that depict different cultures.

The third section of each questionnaire related to the respondent's ethnic group preferences. The college student questionnaire asked respondents to complete a Bogardus social distance type scale[8] to measure attitudes toward

six ethnic groups: American Blacks, Japanese, Germans, Koreans, Mexicans and Vietnamese. Seven statements about each ethnic group could be checked by the students, depending upon their feelings toward the particular group. The seven statements, with their associated scale values, were:

1. would marry into the group. (+3)
2. would have as close friends. (+2)
3. would have as next door neighbors. (+1)
4. would work in the same office. (0)
5. have as speaking acquaintances only. (-1)
6. have as visitors only to my nation. (-2)
7. would debar from my nation. (-3)

The summed scores across all six ethnic groups served as the respondent's ethnic index. Negative scores were taken to reflect a closed-minded orientation toward ethnic groups while positive scores were indications of open-mindedness.

The third section of the telephone survey of residents was much simpler than the student questionnaire. Only four statements, each about one ethnic group, were used. Community residents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with or were undecided with each of the following: "I have no objection to having one of my family members marry a Japanese," "I would like to have a Frenchman as my close friend," "I don't mind a Vietnamese family moving into my neighborhood," and "I want to keep Iranians out of my country entirely either as visitors or citizens." Responses were coded such that agreement with a positive statement was scored "3", disagreement was scored as "1", and undecided was scored "2". The summed scores of the four statements, ranging from a low of 4 to a high of 12, served as the respondents' ethnic index. As in the student questionnaire, high scores were taken to reflect an open-mindedness toward ethnic groups.

The final set of questions were demographic items and included the respondent's sex, age, race, educational level, occupation and political affiliation (students only).

A total of 236 college students drawn from undergraduate sociology classes and 141 randomly selected residents (from the telephone directory) provided usable responses.

RESULTS

Study 1

Demographic data indicated that the resident sample represented a widely heterogenious population. Wide variability was observed in age, educational attainment, and occupation. Slightly less than 90% of the sample were caucasions, indicating that few minorities participated in the study. Females made up more than half (i.e., 56%) of the sample.

Television Program Preferences

Preference data was interpolated from the frequency of watching selected programs data. Among the residents the most preferred program was 60 Minutes ($\bar{X}$ = 3.63). Dallas ($\bar{X}$ = 2.94), the prime time melodrama, was the second most preferred program. The remaining programs, given here in order of preference, were Archie Bunker's Place ($\bar{X}$ = 2.45), The Jeffersons ($\bar{X}$ = 2.40), Quincy, M.E. ($\bar{X}$ = 2.34), 20/20 ($\bar{X}$ = 2.34), Laverne and Shirley ($\bar{X}$ = 2.02), Charlie's Angels ($\bar{X}$ = 1.95), General Hospital ($\bar{X}$ = 1.55) and Angie ($\bar{X}$ = 1.53). The two ethnic comedies, Archie Bunker's Place and The Jeffersons, placed third and fourth respectively.

Evaluation of Shogun

Of the 62 residents who reported that they watched at least one episode of Shogun, 58 provided usable responses for analysis. According to the

results of chi-square goodness of fit tests residents who watched Shogun strongly agreed (i.e., 93% agreement) that the program was entertaining (chi-square = 93.51, 2 df, $p < .05$, critical chi-square = 5.99). Viewers also indicated that they thought that Shogun accurately portrayed oriental history (46.6% agreement, chi-square = 7.70, $p < .05$) and that they had learned a great deal about oriental culture (67.2% agreement, chi-square = 30.29, $p < .05$). Residents agreed that the program was not hard to understand (67.2% agreement, chi-square 32.16, $p < .05$), nor too long and drawn out (48.3% agreement, chi-square = 7.50, $p < .05$). Finally, they disagreed with the statement that Japanese customs were weird (69.0% agreement, chi-square = 33.61, $p < 05$).

Ethnic Preferences and Selective Exposure

The ethnic preference index for residents ranged from a low score of 4, reflecting a bias against ethnic groups, to a high of 12, which was taken to represent a positive orientation toward ethnic groups. Most residents indicated a positive view toward ethnic groups. In fact, only one subject scored lower than six. There were 48 residents (34.8%) who scored in the seven to nine category of moderate ethnicity while 89 (64.5%) respondents were between 10 and 12 on the ethnic scale. These data indicate that the residents in the sample were favorable to various ethnic groups in general.

Despite the general open-mindedness toward ethnic groups, viewers of Shogun were more open-minded toward ethnic groups than were non-viewers ($t = 1.62$, df = 135, $p < .11$). While these results indicate a direction or tendency toward selective exposure, they are nonsignificant.

Study 2

As might be anticipated, the student sample was very homogenious in terms of demographic characteristics. Nearly 90% of the students fell between the

ages of 18 and 21. Approximately 95% of the sample were caucasian reflecting, as in Study 1, little minority participation. Women outnumbered men by about 2 to 1.

Television Program Preferences

The most preferred programs among students were 60 Minutes ($\bar{X}$ = 2.99) and Dallas ($\bar{X}$ = 2.60). Surprisingly, General Hospital[9] was the third most preferred program ($\bar{X}$ = 2.49), reflecting, most likely, the effects of the large proportion of women in the sample. The remaining programs were preferred in the following order: 20/20 ($\bar{X}$ = 2.14), Quincy, M.E. ($\bar{X}$ = 1.89), The Jeffersons ($\bar{X}$ = 1.84), Laverne and Shirley ($\bar{X}$ = 1.67), Charlie's Angels ($\bar{X}$ = 1.54), Archie Bunker's Place ($\bar{X}$ = 1.51), and Angie ($\bar{X}$ = 1.30). The ethnic comedies placed sixth (The Jeffersons) and ninth (Archie Bunker's Place), indicating that these programs were not very popular among students.

Evaluation of "Shogun"

Only 60 of the 236 students in the sample said they had watched at least one episode of Shogun. Data from the 56 usable cases indicated strong agreement on particular evaluations of Shogun among student viewers. Specifically, students agreed that the program was entertaining (78.6% agreement, chi-square = 51.48, df = 2, $p < .05$, critical chi-square = 5.99) and that they preferred to have similar television programming in the future (70.4% agreement, chi-square = 35.11, $p < .05$). Half of the sample did not perceive Shogun as being too violent (chi-square = 11.44, $p < .05$) nor did college viewers feel that Japanese customs were weird (72.2% agreement, chi-square = 39.61, $p < .05$). The sample was characteristically undecided as to whether or not they learned much about oriental culture (51.8% agreement, chi-square = 13.08, $p < .05$) and were also undecided (82.1% agreement) about the program's

accuracy (chi-square = 59.93, $p < .05$). No significant goodness of fit was detected for program length (chi-square = 3.00, n.s.d.) or for program understandability (chi-square = 3.00, n.s.d.).

Additional analyses found that women were more likely to have learned about oriental culture (Rho = .26, $p < .05$), feel that the program was difficult to understand (Rho = .30, $p < .05$), and consider the program too drawn out (Rho = .24, $p < .05$) than men students. No other analyses found any significant patterns among responses.

Ethnic Preferences and Selective Exposure

The ethnic index for students had a potential range from -36, reflecting extremely negative orientations toward ethnic groups, to a high of 36. Only fifteen of the 236 students (6.4%) had negative ethnic ratings. The strong positive orientation toward ethnic groups among students was very similar to the preferences observed among residents. Among students, the most preferred ethnic group was German followed in descending order of preference by Japanese, Mexican, Korean, American Blacks and Vietnamese.

As in the resident sample, data indicated a direction in support of the selective exposure hypothesis. Students who viewed at least one episode of Shogun were more open-minded toward ethnic groups, in general, than were nonviewers ($t = 1.65$, $df = 234$, $p < .10$). In particular, students who watched Shogun tended to be more open-minded toward Japanese than nonviewers ($t = 1.81$, $df = 234$, $p < .07$). These results, while not significant at the traditional criterion level, indicated some support for the selectivity hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The pilot study found that only 38.4% of 185 respondents watched Shogun. Of those who participated in both studies, 32.2% had watched at least one episode of Shogun. Both figures were well below the national average of

62%. It must be stated, however, that the two populations in this study were probably not as typical as expected.

While the results indicated a tendency for selective exposure in the predicted direction they were nonsignificant. It would seem that both groups studied were open-minded toward ethnic groups and that those who watched Shogun were slightly, but nonsignificantly, more positive toward ethnic groups than nonviewers. Residents who watched Shogun were more open ($\bar{X}$ = 10.37) to ethnic groups than were nonviewers ($\bar{X}$ = 9.89), Among the students, ethnic scores for viewers ($\bar{X}$ = 21.48) were higher than for nonviewers ($\bar{X}$ = 18.58). Because so many subjects were positive toward ethnic groups a ceiling effect may have been observed.

Another limitation of the study is related to the operationalization of ethnicity for the resident sample. Residents indicated if they agreed, disagreed or were undecided about four statements concerning relations with ethnic groups. The tradeoff between data collection ease and precision in measurement worked against an effective test of the selective exposure hypothesis.

The results found in this study can be taken as only tentative indications of support for the selective exposure hypothesis. Additional future research should assess the strength of the hypothesis in widely varying contexts and program content areas.

FOOTNOTES

[1]*Broadcasting*, September 29, 1980, 59-60.

[2]*Newsweek*, September 22, 1980, 51.

[3]*Ibid*.

[4]John Howard, George Rothbart and Lee Sloan, "The Response to Roots: A National Survey," *Journal of Broadcasting*, 1978, *22*:3, 279-287.

[5]Melvin A. Goldberg, " 'Roots: The Next Generations'--A Study of Attitude and Behavior," *Television Quarterly*, 1979, *16*:3, 71-74.

[6]Kenneth K. Hur and John P. Robinson, "The Social Impact of 'Roots'," *Journalism Quarterly*, 1978, *55*:1, 19-24.

[7]Neil Vidmar and Milton Rokeach, "Archie Bunker's Bigotry: A Study in Selective Perception and Exposure," *Journal of Communication*, 1974, *24*:1, 36-47.

[8]Cf. E.S. Bogardus, *Social Distance*. Yellow Spring, Ohio: Antiock (1959), pp.7-40.

[9]The relative high ranking for *General Hospital* was surprising. The *Miami Student* campus newspaper reports that large numbers of students are "into" soap operas. *General Hospital* in particular: "Students with three o'clock classes must depend on reliable friends or the 'Soap Opera Digest' for update on G(eneral) H(ospital) action. And profs who teach three o'clock classes are simply out of luck. Class attendance is worse on good soap days. . ." (*Miami Student*, April 17, 1981, p. 6)